Table of Contents

1. Prologue
2. Chapter 1 - Into the Wild
3. Chapter 2 - A Lion's Heart and a Blue Star
4. Chapter 3 - Naming
5. Chapter 4 - Ravenpaw
6. Chapter 5 - The Next Morning
7. Chapter 6 - Hunting
8. Chapter 7 - A Thorn To The Paw
9. Chapter 8 - Sandy Hollow
10. Chapter 9 - Shattering Ice
11. Chapter 10 - Fire and Fury
12. Chapter 11 - Splintering Shards
13. Chapter 12 - The Becoming
14. Chapter 13 - Roots of the Forest
15. Chapter 14 - Where There's Smoke...
16. Chapter 15 - Reaching Vines
17. Chapter 16 - Silver
18. Chapter 17 - Smoke and Thorns

Prologue

[image]

Scourge's mind flashed back through his entire life.

Being the smallest kit, Tiny. Being taunted by his siblings. Going out into the forest to prove his worth. The dark gray tabby with white patches. The blue-gray she-cat. The tortoiseshell she-cat. The dark tabby tom, much larger than himself. And the dark gray one, as he made the dark tabby attack him. He swore he'd get vengeance on these cats, these *Clan cats*. Ruthless and wild, but he was stronger. And recognizing the same dark tabby, later on, trying to get him, Scourge, to fight battles for the dark tabby. He'd struck "Tigerstar" down, but was killed by another leader, the brave, strong, courageous Firestar. These cats' belief in StarClan had saved them. His ice-blue eyes had grown cold.

"Scourge..." a cat whispered. Scourge started. "This is StarClan. We want to offer you a second chance."

He saw a vision. A small black tom, white paws, and his same piercing ice blue eyes. But they weren't filled with hate, violence, and coldness. This tom's were filled with laughter, joy, and happiness. The black tom sat, tail intertwined with another orange tabby cat's tail. The tabby had startling green eyes. Firestar.

"What is this?" he hissed.

"Your second chance," the ghostly cat whispered. She was the same blue-gray from those same moons before. "I am Bluestar."

"You let him hurt me," Scourge growled.

"I am sorry," Bluestar mewed sadly. "When I met Firestar in the forest, I realized that if you had been moons younger, you may have had the courage and potential to be in his place. You were half brothers, you shared a father. Perhaps, for a turn of fate, you might have been siblings. Siblings of Fire and Ice. Maybe there was a

second prophecy. One Spottedleaf missed. I am offering you a second chance."

"I... I accept."

Chapter 1 - Into the Wild

"C'mon, Tiny!" Rusty mewed. The ginger tabby tom flicked his tail back and forth in excitement.

"I don't know," Scourge meowed back. Should he keep Rusty from becoming Firestar? Or should they go into the forest together this time?

"Please? I'm so curious and Smudge says it's dangerous in there," Rusty begged.

"Much, much more dangerous than you could ever imagine," Scourge hissed. "Don't go in there." But he'd seen how Firestar had prospered under the love of his Clanmates back in ThunderClan.

"No! I'm going! Tiny, are you coming or not?" Rusty's tail slapped the road in irritation.

There was a battle raging inside Scourge. Tigerstar was Tigerclaw, no chance of him attacking with his brother on a patrol as well. But... Rusty was his brother. Rusty had become a valiant leader who deserved the best. "... Yes, I'll come." he finally decided. He would face Tigerstar with his brother by his side.

So, together they wandered into the wilderness. Rusty's eyes narrowed, focusing on a small mammal. Scourge turned the other way, his small, lithe movements making up for any heavy footfalls he made. Little did his brother know, he already knew how to hunt - and fight. He spied a bird, probably a pigeon. His ice eyes gleamed with eagerness and anticipation. He couldn't remember how birds even tasted. His tailed twitched, but he straightened it as he crept along the ground. He shivered. His soft kittypet fur wasn't helping him much here. He bunched his haunches and leapt, grabbing the bird. But his claws weren't as sharp as in the old days, when he ruled BloodClan, so it took a lot more effort than usual to catch it. But Scourge made it.

--- POV Switch (Rusty)

Far away in the forest, Rusty hunted the mouse, his green eyes gleaming. He leapt, but the mouse scurried away. He moaned. Suddenly, he heard a yowl from the forest. Was that Tiny?

--- POV Switch (Scourge)

A gray tom barrelled into me. I yowled in anger, though this wasn't the first time I'd been attacked. I wasn't a high-ranking cat any more. Why couldn't my silly little mouth remember that? However, my eyes glinted at the challenge. It was a young cat, probably an apprentice. He was from ShadowClan, his smell matched that of the patrol he'd met in his first life. But... not that of the Tigerstar he'd slain. It was very confusing.

Scourge knew he was smaller, but he grabbed onto the apprentice, scratching at his belly. Rusty arrived. The apprentice shook Scourge off, and laid chase to Rusty. No! Not his brother. Scourge ran and gave chase, tumbling into the youngling when his proud brother turned to fight.

His heart swelled. This was what Bluestar's offer had meant. Suddenly, a wispy blue-gray she-cat began to appear in front of him.

"Bluestar?" He whispered, ice eyes widening. "Is that really you?"

"Yes, my youngling," she mewed. "By the way... which name do you prefer? Tiny, the name your brother - and you have an amazing brother - knows you by, or Scourge, the name you killed countless cats by. You are not a scourge anymore. Please, go on, be free. Discover your new destiny, Tiny. Spottedleaf found the prophecy we missed. *Fire and Ice will save the forest.* I know what it means. Your brother's fiery pelt, and your ice blue eyes. It matches your personalities, too. But I know you will be an amazing ThunderClan cat. But now, I will have to go. This life's Bluestar waits in ThunderClan. Do me well, brave one."

"No! No! Not you, Bluestar! You can't leave me!" Tiny yowled. His eyes burned with tears of sadness, pain, and regret. He *would* be

better. Better than his old life. He would do it for Bluestar.

Chapter 2 - A Lion's Heart and a Blue Star

"Graypaw, who are these cats?" Bluestar meowed. "Why have you been attacking kittypets? You're supposed to be a watchful ThunderClan apprentice, not a battle-hungry killer. StarClan knows the Clans have had enough of those in the past."

Tiny realized that Bluestar was rather eerily foretelling the future, though he doubted she knew. He felt empty and hollow from the fading of Bluestar's ghost. She had been wise. Tiny dropped onto his paws, lowering his head to her and tucking his tail in submission. "We... wandered into the forest. We did not think other cats lived here," he said. His nose twitched. The air here smelled fresh, unlike that of the Twolegplace.

"You come here to hunt for sport. We hunt to survive," Bluestar hissed at Rusty, replying to something he'd meowed on the quiet.

"I had not thought of it that way before. I will not hunt here again," Rusty spoke up.

"You are very interesting kittypets," Bluestar mewed. "I've not seen any kittypets turn and fight before. And never in all my moons did I think one would ever *attack* one of us ThunderClan cats. Tell me... how would you like to join ThunderClan?"

A golden tom burst of out of the bushes. "Graypaw! There you ar-" the tom's yowl was cut of by a sharp tail flick from Bluestar.

"Lionheart, I've offered for these two cats to join ThunderClan."

"It's a privilege," the large tom growled.

"Well?" Bluestar mewed. "Do you accept?"

Tiny stepped forward. "Yes, we do."

He would learn to grow and change with his brother in this new life, a life he was sure he'd come to love.

Chapter 3 - Naming

[image]

"I name you Firepaw, after your flame-colored pelt," Bluestar meowed. Tiny's chest still ached from the loss of spirit Bluestar. Then the real Bluestar turned to him.

"Tiny," she meowed. "I name you Icepaw, in honor of your ice-blue eyes."

"Firepaw! Icepaw! Firepaw! Icepaw!" The crowd chanted.

"Firepaw, Icepaw, since you are new to this Clan-"

"Where are they from?" A tabby tom yowled. "They smell an awful lot like kittypets! They'll be a deadweight in ThunderClan, sucking up our precious resources!"

"Longtail," Lionheart hissed. "Icepaw, are you going to sit here and take this?"

"Of course not," Icepaw hissed back. He crouched, stilling. He found Longtail's tabby body in the crowd. Yowling, he flung himself upon his tormentor, scratching, only to be joined by Firepaw, his brother.

They fought paw by paw, fiercely fighting together.

"Stop!" Bluestar called them off, her blue eyes searing into the crowd.

Firepaw and Icepaw stopped.

"As I was saying before Longtail interrupted this Clan meeting, Firepaw and Icepaw are new to the Clan. Whitestorm will test Icepaw and I will test Firepaw, and based on that we will determine which mentors will be best suited to teach them."

Icepaw smiled ferociously, his ice eyes glinting in anticipation. His life with ThunderClan was about to begin.

Chapter 4 - Ravenpaw

"Redtail is dead!" a little black cat collapses on the ground. Icepaw instantly bristled, his ice eyes wide in shock.

Bluestar cried out, rushing over to a large tabby, who dropped a black tom with a bushy red tail on the ground.

"Tigerclaw," she cries. "What happened?"

Instantly I know that Tigerclaw is the cat who harmed me - the cat who I killed. "Don't trust him," I whisper to Firepaw.

Graypaw, who's been idly chatting with Firepaw for a while, speaks up. "He's Ravenpaw's mentor. They're so lucky, they got to attack *River*-" He's cut off by a loud hiss. "Sorry, Smallear," he mewed.

The tortoiseshell from Scourge's life burst out of the medicine cat den. "How did Ravenpaw get injured?"

Just then, Graypaw *mrrow*ed with laughter. "Spottedleaf is Tigerclaw's aunt - and here I was thinking she was young."

As Tigerclaw explained what had happened, Icepaw had the strange urge to attack the tom. Before he could stop himself, he flung himself upon the cat who would become Tigerstar - unless Icepaw killed him before he got to it.

Chapter 5 - The Next Morning

"Firepaw, Icepaw, wake up!" Graypaw yelled. "It's time to train! Sandpaw and Dustpaw are already up! Today Lionheart is going to take us to the Fourtrees with *Bluestar!* And *Whitestorm!*

"Nothing special about cleaning the elders' ticks," Lionheart called. "Hurry up!"

Graypaw screeched and rocketed out of the den. Icepaw followed him hesitantly, and for the first time, he *looked*, really *looked* at the camp.

He saw a tortoiseshell queen, nursing her kits. Icepaw winced. He couldn't believe it, but he felt threatened by the small family. A black tom strode over and licked the she-cat between the ears, purring at her. Would this family try to kill him like in BloodClan? Scour- Icepaw stumbled back, bumping into Graypaw.

"Woah, Icepaw, what started you?" he asked jovially.

"Ah, nothing," he muttered. A light gray tomkit turned to look at him. A darker she-kit turned too.

"Ashkit, Fernkit, wanna play?" another kit's voice rang out. It was a dark tabby tomkit.

"Sure, Bramblekit," Ashkit said.

Icepaw shuddered and turned to follow Bluestar out of camp.

"Come with me," the blue she-cat instructed. She led the way out of camp. Icepaw followed, but soon his pads ached - badly. He sighed and continued to follow, until he felt a sharp stab of pain in his paw. He grimaced, but pushed on. If he showed weakness, who knew what could happen. There were all sorts of creatures in the woods. Plus, he was new to hunting. He'd only ever learned to fight, and jump off rafters, and dodge monsters - the type that ate

twolegs. He paused, licking the gash. It was bleeding quite a lot, but he figured it'd have to stop eventually. He'd gotten by in the alleyways of the twolegplace without a medicine cat. He'd never loved being fussed over, hated it really.

After a while and a bit of pain, they'd reached Fourtrees. Icepaw couldn't help but gasp at the four giant oaks, towering over them. But something tugged at him, something odd. There was something here. Icepaw rolled his eyes, shoving the feeling away. It was just his old instincts from Scourge's life.

"Why don't you hunt here," Bluestar instructed. "We'll see what you each bring back. When you hear me yowl, just come back. Don't feel pressured to catch more prey than you can handle."

But Icepaw was. And that feeling was back, rushing through his veins like ice.

Chapter 6 - Hunting

Icepaw heard a rustle in the treetops. He stood, listening carefully. A small cat growled at him. It looked remarkably like him, with the same white paw and ice blue eyes. But the collar - it was studded with dog teeth, and this cat's claws... Icepaw realized it was him.

He wanted to fight. But that was Scourge. Not Icepaw. But before he could stop himself, he leapt at this cat. It leapt backwards, and he fell into a nettle bush. Scrapes stung his pelt, and he fled back to the central oak. He tensed.

A little creature sniffed around in the underbrush. Icepaw attempted to jump on the vole, but landed on a stick. He yowled in pain as the stick got under his paw's cut. Graypaw rushed over with Bluestar.

"Landed on a sharp stone," he laughed nervously. "Silly me. It didn't break skin, though." This was untrue. His paw throbbed something fierce.

"Icepaw, Firepaw, I think that's enough," Bluestar said. "I've decided on your mentors."

Chapter 7 - A Thorn To The Paw

"Icepaw," somebody murmured.

Icepaw flashed up, claws at the ready, hackles raised. Firepaw backed up. "Icepaw, we're in camp. Bluestar's my mentor, she let you sleep in, but it's your turn now."

Embarrassed at being late, Icepaw stumbled into camp. His paw hurt when it touched ground, so he tried to hide his limp and stumble along like he was sleepy.

"Icepaw's mentor will be Longtail," Bluestar continued. "They have the same battle-ready personality, and it's time for Longtail to become a mentor. He's a young warrior, but I believe that he is suited for Icepaw."

Icepaw stretched to touch noses with Longtail. His injured paw hit the ground. He couldn't help but wince. In front of the whole Clan.

"Is something wrong?" Longtail whispered.

"Ah, no," Icepaw murmured back, trying to conceal his paw, which was freshly bleeding and had been oozing pus since he woke up at dawn and decided to go back to sleep.

"I smell blood!" A prettily dappled she-cat rushed into camp. "Who's injured?"

"Nobody," Bluestar meowed, confused. "Are you sure it's not just Ravenpaw?"

"No, he's healed, and he-" Spottedleaf was cut off by Tigerclaw.

"Well, then who's injured?" the tabby tom growled. "You're mother's sister, Spottedleaf, you should have a sharp enough nose."

"Tigerclaw, no need for that," Bluestar meowed.

"Icepaw! It's your paw!" Spottedleaf exclaimed. "Oh no, I'll have to bring you to my den. Silly thing, you should've told me. Looks like it hurts!"

Icepaw hissed, and raised his hackles.

"Icepaw, behave," Longtail whispered. "Spottedleaf won't hurt you. She'll help you."

Icepaw hesitated, but lowered his hackles slowly. Spottedleaf led him into her den. At least the lichen covered his humiliation from the other members of the Clan. Spottedleaf sighed, and snatched herbs from her alcoves. "Cobweb, marigold - wait, maybe horse tail too... poppy seeds? Probably. Oh - nettle leaves." Icepaw bristled, remembering his spiky encounter with the nettle earlier.

Spottedleaf laid the items on a flat stone and had him stretch his paw out. Reluctantly, he laid his paw flat. Spottedleaf gave him poppy seeds to chew. "For the pain," she said.

"No, I can handle it," he replied. A thorn in the paw wouldn't beat him, and it never would. Spottedleaf chewed up the horse tail ferns and made the marigold into a poultice. She mixed them together and spread it over his wound, adding chewed nettle leaves to the mix. She wrapped his paw with cobwebs.

"StarClan, it stings," he muttered.

"Well, then come to me before it gets infected." Spottedleaf gave a small *mrrow* of laughter to accompany her words.

Icepaw sighed and trudged out of the medicine den.

Chapter 8 - Sandy Hollow

"Icepaw?" Longtail's voice floated into the apprentices' den. "Today's the first day of your training! Get up, we have to trek to the Sandy Hollow."

Icepaw raised himself up on three paws. His fourth still ached, and it was wrapped up in cobwebs. He tried to rush out of camp with Longtail, but Spottedleaf intercepted him. "Icepaw?" she asked. "Let me take off those cobwebs, okay?"

Icepaw dragged himself over, sighing. "Fine," he groaned. "Take them off."

Spottedleaf peeled back the cobwebs to reveal a perfectly healed paw. Icepaw grinned and stumbled back to Longtail.

"How ya doing, Icepaw?" he asked. "All right?"

"I'm good," Icepaw mewed. "Let's go."

Longtail turned and Icepaw followed him, trying to memorize the path from the camp to the hollow. It was only a short way, but compared to what Scourge had seen every day, the trees all looked the same. He noted one nurse log, but nothing else. Forward, left, right, forward. Jump over the ditch, around the pond, through the ditch, right, forward, left... it went on and on, seemingly forever, even though Icepaw knew it wasn't really that long of a transition. He admired Longtail's sharp eyes and easy navigation of the trail. He stumbled along behind.

After what seemed like a lifetime, they stopped. A large, sunken patch of sunlight stood in their way. It was filled to the top with a coarse, brownish-yellow... dirt... but it was grainier.

Longtail noticed his confusion and smiled. "It's gravel, Icepaw," he laughed.

"Oh," Icepaw mewed, he could feel blood rushing to his face. "Yes." Luckily, cats couldn't see it when other cats blushed.

"Come on," Longtail said. "We're fighting today, Icepaw."

Icepaw shuddered, but he also smiled. This was the beginning of his new legacy - as a cat of ThunderClan.

"Icepaw?" Longtail's voice jolted him out of his thoughts. "Come, we've got practice to do." Longtail flicked his ear impatiently.

Icepaw strolled over, blinking his icy eyes. He unsheathed his claws, scraping them roughly against the gravel. *Skritch, scratch.*

"Icepaw, why are you unsheathing your claws?" Longtail asked, alarmed. "We practice with our claws sheathed."

Icepaw nodded. *That was a big mistake.*

Chapter 9 - Shattering Ice

Icepaw shifted in his nest, restless. He hadn't gotten a good night of sleep since joining ThunderClan. Perhaps it had something to do with how... at odds he was with this environment. He certainly was new to living with so many cats, and he was still fumbling with threads of their culture.

Icepaw stretched, nudging Dustpaw.

"Ouch," the irate tom growled. "Why do you sleep with your claws unsheathed, you goon?"

I wasn't aware I did, Icepaw responded mentally. He looked down at his paws. True to Dustpaw's word, they were unsheathed, their pointy tips glinting the sunlight that poked through the brambles.

"He's a kittypet," Sandpaw prodded. "He doesn't know how to sleep like a civilized warrior."

"Warriors are the uncivilized ones!" Icepaw growled. Then he realized what he had said. "Oh- I didn't mean it like that, I-"

"Wait until Bluestar hears about this!" Sandpaw crowed. "I told her we shouldn't have let a pair of kittypets into the Clan. Firepaw is soft and daft and you're uncivilized and rude."

Icepaw waited anxiously as Bluestar stepped out of her den. "Icepaw and Firepaw have shown disrespect for the ways of the Clan cats. Perhaps I was not so wise to invite kittypets into the Clan. I was too eager to help ThunderClan that I failed to see that the solution could not come forced. ThunderClan will preserve on its own. I will have Lionheart bring Rusty and Tiny to the Clan border."

Stripped of his name and his chance to become a warrior, Tiny felt enraged. His unsheathed claws scraped against stone as he growled. Tiny leaped at Bluestar. His claws slashed her flank in one piercing blow as her blood tinted his claws light red. Spottedleaf rushed out

of the medicine den. "What's happened to Bluestar?"

"Tiny attacked her!" Ravenpaw mewled, shaking fearfully.

"I'm not Tiny," Tiny growled. "I am *Scourge*, and one day it will be *I* who rules the forest!" Then he raced out of camp.

Chapter 10 - Fire and Fury

Tiny and Firepaw had been travelling for days.

"Why do we even need those scummy Clan cats anyways?" Tiny grumbled. *I became the fiercest cat, almost brought down all* four *Clans, and he values the precious Clan that threw him out.*

"Stop!" Firepaw screamed. "Just stop! These *scummy Clans* were where I *belonged*, Tiny! Do you even understand loyalty, to your kin, your Clan? I was *exiled* because *you* couldn't keep your mouth closed. You don't belong with the Clans, you're too cold. You're a *scourge* to the happiness of others."

A scourge. That's what he always was. "Fine!" Tiny yelled backed. "You *think* I'm a scourge. You have *no clue* what my life has been like!"

I'm not Tiny anymore. I'm not Icepaw, either. I'm Scourge. *I'll never be anything else.*

Scourge snarled. His hackles raised as he narrowed his ice blue eyes at his brother, his mortal enemy, his killer... *It didn't have to be this way*, that nagging little voice at the back of his head whispered. *Just because this is easier doesn't mean it's right.*

"I don't care what's right," he whispered.

"I *know* what your life has been like," Firepaw said. "We *grew up* together, Tiny."

"No we didn't," Scourge said quietly. "I was born to our father and another kittypet, Quince. My siblings bullied me. I went out to the woods to prove myself. Tigerclaw *attacked me*. I was saved b-by Bluestar... he let me go with some wounds. I tried to take off my collar with a dog tooth. It got stuck in my collar, so I pretended I'd taken the tooth as a prize from killing a dog. I named myself Scourge. Then I decided I wanted to rule the forest. I came head to

head with you... Firestar. You killed me. Then, as I was dying, fading away, Bluestar-"

"Don't you dare say her name!" Firepaw hissed. "You *attacked* her and then you start spewing this ridiculous- I don't know what to call it. Scourge, leave me in peace. Maybe Bluestar will let me rejoin her Clan."

Scourge had failed Bluestar's spirit and himself.

Chapter 11 - Splintering Shards

It was midnight. After Scourge's outburst, he and Firepaw had been mad at each other, but Scourge didn't have anywhere to go, so he had to stay with his brother.

Thoughts floated through his head, everything from, *how could Bluestar's spirit forsake me* to *I hate the Clans, they're disloyal cats without a speck of honor*. But he knew that Bluestar's spirit was gone. His only believer, gone. At least he still had his memories - and his skills.

Scourge smiled as he remembered the feeling of unsheathing his claws, remembered the way it had felt to get his revenge on Tigerstar and Bluestar. But now it was over, just a dream that fluttered away the more you tried to chase it, like feathers floating on the wind. Scourge had always hated kit's toys. He stretched in his nest. But then he thought of Bluestar... spirit Bluestar. *Spirit Bluestar is dead now,* he told himself. *Nobody believes in me anymore, not even my own "brother".* Now that nobody cared, he could do whatever he wanted. That was the thing. He then remembered what had made everybody fear him - his collar. Studded with dog teeth, it had been a source of pride for him as he'd formed BloodClan. *Why did I admire the Clans so much?* He asked himself. *I named my group Blood*Clan. *Why? What did I see in them?* Scourge sighed. But then a plan came to mind. Tonight, he would make himself a collar. He knew where the dog's corpse was. He supposed its claws might still be laying around.

"Tiny?" Firepaw asked. "What are you doing?"

Quickly Scourge remembered an excuse Graypaw had told him about when they entered ThunderClan. *They say "I'm going to the dirt-place" and everyone believes them*, Graypaw had said about Darkstripe and Longtail. *I say they're plotting something.* Scourge had known what, but he hadn't said anything.

"Tinyyyyyyy?" Firepaw prompted.

"I'm going to dirt-place," Scourge said. "And my name is Scourge, not Tiny."

Firepaw nodded, showing no signs of their earlier fight. "Why?" he asked.

"Like you said," Scourge noted curtly, "I'm a scourge to your destiny, Firestar."

"Are you trying to *mock* me?" Firepaw asked.

He'd slipped up, called his brother by his future name. "N-No," he murmured. He slipped out of their makeshift camp.

Scourge raised his nose to the air and opened his mouth slightly, letting the smells flood his senses. His razor-sharp abilities had been dulled by his months as a kittypet and a kitten, but they worked just fine.

Twolegplace was north. Silently, Scourge slipped away into the darkness.

Scourge woke just as the sun was slipping above the horizon. He hadn't travelled far into the mess of Thunderpaths and Twoleg nests quite yet. He remembered how he'd found the teeth to stick into his collar. But his had snapped off back in ThunderClan, the Clan of stuck-up, arrogant wildcats. Now he needed a collar.

Chapter 12 - The Becoming

Scourge travelled through the streets of the Twolegplace, carefully watching kittypets as he prowled through the streets. He wanted a Twoleg who wouldn't keep him inside the nest, but one who would take pride in him, help him be strong, and put a collar on him. Then he met a street cat named Eagle who knew exactly which Twoleg nest he should choose.

"So anyway," Eagle was saying, "There's a she-cat named Ivy who prowls those parts. She controls a gang of cats, calls them the Becoming. She's a rogue cat, with the threats to prove it. Ivy will help you escape your Twolegs, and you can try to leave the Becoming. You seem like the brave type, brave enough to try to escape her. But-"

Suddenly, a rope landed around Eagle's neck. Scourge leapt around, raised his hackles, and hissed. But he was helpless to do anything as Twolegs dragged Eagle off.

It's fine, he told himself. *Emotions help no one.* He continued grimly in the direction Eagle had told him to go. After around half a moon, he'd learned to drown his emotions in bloodlust and hate, the feelings that had helped him found BloodClan. His Clan. Those cats were probably with this Ivy now. Maybe he could overthrow her.

Soon enough, he reached Ivy's "home". A ginger cat jumped out at him.

"Who are you-"

But then Scourge was on him, grabbing fur with his claws, and ripping up the ginger tom's back. Scourge grunted. He hadn't used the killing bite in moons, since he had preferred to rip an enemy's throat open. But right now he was weak. So it was his only option. Scourge twisted, grabbing his opponent's neck, and gave a quick twist. A resounding *crack* echoed through the Twolegplace.

Three black kittens scampered up a hill, and after a few seconds, a beautiful Siamese she-cat with icy blue eyes stepped up to Scourge.

"Who are you, little one?" she purred. "To defeat Adder like that, you'd need years of training. What are you? A refugee, a traitor from the Clans-" she paused, and sniffed. "Ah, yes. ThunderClan, if I'm not mistaken. With kittypet heritage."

Stunned, Scourge nodded. "What do you want from me?" he hissed.

"My name is Ivy," the she-cat purred. She unsheathed her claws, which were dagger-sharp. "I will take you into the Becoming. What is your name, little one?"

"My name is Scourge," Scourge said, his voice coming out strong and confident. "Once, my name was Tiny, but I am small no longer. I will not be called *little one* without a fight, *Ivy*." He boldly sneered the last word.

"Very well," she purred, not even flinching at his hostility. "Welcome to the Becoming, Scourge. We welcome you. Now, normally you would take up Adder's position, but I will have the Nightshades do that," she said, flicking her tail at the three black kittens. Each had their own stunning eyes, one set pale gray, one set deep purple, and one set a bright, orange copper.

"What can three kittens do?" he asked, stunned.

"Kill," Ivy said humorlessly. "Now, my pretty one," she continued, swapping the old nickname for a new one, "I will have you as part of my *personal guard*."

The whole group of cats gasped.

"Very well," Scourge said slyly. "But I have one caveat."

Ivy nodded. "We can provide it." This summoned more gasps.

"I want every member of the Becoming to get a Twoleg collar-"

"No."

"Hear me out."

"Very well," Ivy said, blue eyes curious, *and* suspicious.

"I want every member of the Becoming to get a Twoleg collar. Then, they must escape the Twolegs, and kill a dog to prove their strength. They must stud their collar with dog teeth. Once, I covered my claws with the tips of dogs' claws, and I had dog teeth in my collar. If I can complete this trial, your cats should be able to. A test of strength."

Ivy nodded. "Then, by all means, let the Trials begin."

Chapter 13 - Roots of the Forest

*** Firepaw's Point of View ***

Firepaw strolled leisurely through the forest. It had only been about a moon since he'd found Yellowfang off in ThunderClan territory, and it had made Bluestar - and Graypaw - distrust him. First he shows "disloyalty" to ThunderClan and is banished, and then he takes in a scraggly rogue hunting on Clan territory. He was on *thin* ice. Thin ice with Bluestar, thin ice with Graypaw, thin ice with ThunderClan... and also, on thin ice with Sandpaw, who he was quickly developing a crush on.

Firepaw resented it, but he knew that the smart, sarcastic, snappy she-cat was getting to him. She was admirably brave, and her resentment towards kittypets was... relatable, he supposed, considering how the tales of Pinestar had portrayed the leader-turned-kittypet as lazy, foolish, and rude.

Suddenly, there was a crashing in the bushes. A short, white cat was bumbling about, with a deep claw wound on his shoulder. The cat was staggering about in a sort of haze, jiggling the ripped, blue Twoleg collar on his neck.

"Dog, dog!" the cat was calling. "Come fight me!"

"Woah," Firepaw said, inching closer. "I'm afraid you can't stay in ThunderClan territory. But if you could just stop the yowling and calm down, I think I can help you get your collar off and heal that wound. So you can leave your Twolegs behind and get a new life, y'know?"

But the white cat just hissed. Firepaw looked at him cautiously, just before the raving cat leapt at him.

"If I can't kill dog, I will kill cat. Join Ivy and the Becoming!" It yowled before jumping at him.

Firepaw reeled back in shock before striking the cat on the chest, but the cat was skittering around and twisted at just the right point. The white cat was hit in the stomach, crushing Firepaw's claws out of their sheaths. The ginger tom cried out in horror as his white claws sliced into his opponent's stomach, fatally wounding him.

But as the cat wretched and convulsed on the ground something unexpected happened.

A small black tom with a purple collar studded with teeth lunged out of the bushes, slicing open the cat's stomach from head to tail - using a *white paw*. Then the cat looked up, piercing Firepaw with his ice blue eyes.

"Scourge?"

Chapter 14 - Where There's Smoke...

"Yes, *Firepaw*," Scourge hissed. He rattled the bone-studded collar on his neck as much as he could, though it was snug and tight around his neck. "Missed me?"

"Not at all, *Scourge*," Firepaw sneered back. He was trying to mock his brother, but it didn't work. Scourge smiled as he watched Firepaw sink back into the hate they'd once had for each other. It would always work out this way, Bluestar or no Bluestar.

"We're brothers," Scourge purred. "Come join me and Ivy in the Becoming. You'll have everything you ever needed. Cats, the wild, and being able to hunt and catch your own food. You won't be able to get rid of that pesky collar, but as you can see, I've turned it into a weapon of my own."

Firepaw raised his hackles and hissed.

The two cats began to instinctively circle each other, snarling and hissing.

"Why did you have to be such a horrible brother?" Firepaw flung out.

Unexpectedly, the words were a dagger to the icy wall Scourge had built as a newcomer to Ivy's group, and he almost gasped as Firepaw's words started make him feel... Something he'd never enjoyed, not since those three or four moons he was able to register playing with Rusty as a kitten. Scourge *hated* feelings and the weakness they brought with them.

"Why did you have to shatter my life?" he asked.

"We were so close."

Scourge's icy wall cracked again.

"I *loved* you."

Crack.

"You were my *brother*."

Smash.

"Who are you now?"

Scourge's walls crumbled down as he lunged at Firepaw.

"You will never understand me, Firepaw! You will become the leader of your Clan, be their savior, the center of their beautiful prophecies. All the fame and legend will go to *you*, and my story will fly away like smoke in the wind!"

Firepaw gasped, turned, and ran from the clearing.

Chapter 15 - Reaching Vines

"Where's Flake?" Ivy asked as Scourge edged back into camp. "Did he escape you?"

"Of course not!" Scourge hissed. "I killed him with a blow to the underbelly." Scourge flashed his red claws.

Ivy laughed and purred. "Of course, Scourge." She came up to him and lowered herself onto her belly, with her paws tucked beneath her. "And look at me, I got my collar - and guess what?"

"What?" Scourge asked, looking at Ivy almost excitedly. "What is it, Ivy?"

"It's green!" she cheered. She raised her head, showing off the green collar. It was almost completely ringed in dog teeth and claws, and then she raised her paw. "Look at my claws," she whispered. They were covered with dog claws and stuck on with sap, just like Scourge had done to his own claws.

"Impressive," Scourge purred. "Ivy, can I talk to you for a moment?"

For a half second, Ivy looked happy, truly happy, but then something crossed her face, and she said, "Sorry, Scourge, but a cat's looking for you, some loner named Raspberry."

"Raspberry?" he asked, then remembered Eagle talking about his young daughter, who was just a five-moon-old kitten. She would be around seven or eight moons now. "I'll see her," he said, interested in testing his skills with a jailbreak or something...

Ivy nodded and led Scourge down the tunnels under Twolegplace.

"What prey do you like, from ThunderClan?" she asked abruptly.

"I wasn't there for long enough to taste much fresh-kill, but the first piece I ever had was a pigeon or a dove. It was pale gray, but I can't remember the name," he replied. "A pigeon or a dove, but I like to

think it was a dove. Pigeons are city birds, and I liked to think I'd caught a true forest bird."

Ivy laughed at this, and Scourge joined her.

"I never realized that doves didn't really mean anything," he continued. "To this day, they still make me happy. Well..." he stumbled, struggling to get over the implied notion that he was still a foolish kit who loved his favorite prey.

"I know," Ivy laughed. "I still can't resist a frog, one of the bullfrogs especially."

Scourge nodded. "I've never tasted one," he commented. "I'd be very interested in seeing what that's about. I've heard that ShadowClan eats frogs."

"We're here," Ivy said abruptly as a tiny bit of something started to flicker in her gaze, turning to point her tail at an exit to the tunnels and sprinting off back through the darkness.

Scourge turned his head to watch her run off, and then climbed out of the tunnel, right into the face of a ginger tabby cat.

"Oof!" she squeaked as he ran into her.

Within an instant, Scourge was on top of her with his claws at her throat.

"Eep!" She squeaked. "What is wrong with you?"

Scourge lifted his claws a tiny bit. "Are you Raspberry?"

"Y-Yes," she squeaked. "I need you to break my father, Eagle, out of that Twoleg nest, there." She pointed with her tail at a small, gray nest. "The Twolegs delivered him to the housefolk that live there."

Scourge nodded. "Wait here."

Then, he edged along the streets, trying to hide his collar from the Twolegs. He sprinted the way towards the gray Twoleg house, then paused, searching for ways in and out. He saw a hole in the wall of

the nest, but it was covered with vine-y mesh.

Then, he noticed an open window, only about half a cat's height. He could fit in here, since he was rather small. Scourge inched inside the nest, watching as a Twoleg caught sight of him. Scourge rushed over to Eagle, and hit the tom with a blow to the head. Eagle passed out, and Scourge grabbed the tom in his jaws.

"StarClan's kits," he cursed softly as the Twolegs rushed him. He'd really have to do this, wouldn't he?

Scourge hissed and leapt at one of the Twolegs. Every time they tried to grab him, he scratched their face and necks, before leaping down to drag Eagle to the door.

If I act exhausted and like I want to flee, they might open the door, he thought.

So he did just that. Scourge whimpered and whined before nudging the door pathetically with his head.

And the Twolegs sighed and opened the door.

Grabbing his victory with both paws, he yanked Eagle out the door by his scruff and raced the big tom down the street to Raspberry.

"What have you done?" she gasped.

"He's just unconscious," Scourge grunted as Eagle groaned and blinked open his eyes. "Well, get him somewhere safe. I have to leave now."

Scourge sprinted back through the tunnels, before stopping at the entrance, clutching the reward Raspberry had given him, a bundle of precious feverfew to treat Bone. Yes, that Bone, who was now Ivy's personal guard, just like him. But Scourge didn't really *want* to kill Ivy and take over.

Then, he gasped as he stepped into the Becoming's "camp." Off to the side of the fresh-kill pile, there lay a dove and a small frog.

Ivy's ice blue eyes met his ice blue eyes, and she smiled softly. "Are

you going to eat?" she asked.

Chapter 16 - Silver

Scourge padded through the streets of the Twolegplace. His paws felt light with happiness as he practically danced over the asphalt. He inhaled, and the tangy scent of smoke entered his nose.

Confused, he shifted his mouth open and let the smell reach the special scent organ on the roof of his mouth. Yep, definitely smoke. But where was it coming from?

Scourge heard a yowl of distress. It was a she-cat, locked somewhere in the burning Twoleg nest as it crumbled into ashes. He shook of the last of his happiness and focused on the house. *I have to save the she-cat*, he thought. *I have to save her.*

Scourge leapt up to one of the holes in the side of the Twoleg nest. The clear film was almost hot enough to burn him on touch. "Don't breathe in the smoke!" he shouted to the cat on the other side of the window. "I'm coming!" He raced through the open Twoleg door and, eyes watering, sprinted towards her.

"Help!" a smoky gray she-cat called. She was barely a kitten, and she looked petrified with fear as she flailed around. The soft amber eyes she sent his way were pleading and scared, and Scourge couldn't help but want to save the little thing.

He jumped through the hole on the side of the Twoleg nest and landed past one of the fires to land by the kitten. He snatched her up by the scruff of her neck and attempted to leap back toward the window. But he missed by about a tail-length and went plummeting into the fire. The little kitten screeched as pain rushed through Scourge's body. Frantic, he clawed his way up the hot wood and leapt out the window. Many Twolegs rushed them, but none of them attempted to take him or the kitten until giant Twoleg paws reached down from the sky. Scourge dropped the kitten and hissed, baring his teeth and raising his hackles. But the kit gasped in pain, and he snatched her back up before racing away towards the sewers that led to the Becoming's camp.

When he arrived, his legs felt weak, and he collapsed to the ground.

"Scourge!" Ivy screeched, racing over to him. "Oh no! No, no, no!"

Chapter 17 - Smoke and Thorns

Scourge awoke with Ivy staring over at him, her ice-blue eyes filled with worry. He coughed, and raised his head before attempting to climb to his feet. He was wobbly, but he made it. His purple collar flashed in the sunlight, and he padded over to Ivy, wincing at the way his tender paws hit the rocky cement ground.

"Where's the kitten?" he asked, his voice rough from the smoke.

Ivy's eyes widened, but she nodded towards a little gray bundle on the ground. Scourge hurried over, nudging the kitten with his nose.

"Little one," he whispered. "Little kitten."

His voice became more frantic as he nudged her harder. "Kitten!"

"Her name is Silver," Ivy mewed softly.

"Silver!" Scourge shouted.

"What?" The kitten mewed weakly.

"H-how are you?" Scourge asked.

"I'm fine," Silver meowed quietly. "Except for my paw." She extended one of her forelegs, and Scourge gasped as he saw the twisted, burnt paw. He felt so guilty. If he hadn't missed at that jump -

"Don't blame yourself," Ivy mewed softly to him. "If you hadn't helped her, Silver wouldn't be alive. And the Becoming wouldn't have its newest member. We had the Nightshades make her a collar."

Scourge smiled softly and leaned down to nuzzle Silver. She squealed happily and batted at his ears. Then, he noticed the soft orange collar with one dog tooth on it around her neck.

"That's your collar, right?" he asked.

"Yeah," Silver meowed. "It's my old collar from when I belonged to those Twolegs. See how the edges are gray-ish and charred?"

Scourge nodded. "Can you walk?"

Silver stumbled out of her mossy bed and attempted to stand before falling over. But Ivy darted over and had the kitten lean on her. Scourge supported Silver on the other side as the kitten attempted to balance on three legs.

After a couple of tries, Silver managed to stumble a couple steps before tripping into Scourge again. He licked her ear and encouraged her to try again.

"If you can get to the fresh-kill pile, you can pick which piece of prey you get," Ivy said.

After a little while, Silver had gotten to the fresh-kill pile, and had settled back in her bed with a little mouse.

"I'm going hunting," Scourge lied, dashing towards the forest. He had heard a story about a WindClan cat who had been born without a paw. Maybe they could help. Maybe Silver belonged in WindClan, with cats who would support her. Maybe-

Scourge was so focused on his thoughts that he didn't notice the smell of a mouse, or the flash of fur as a cat leapt out of a bush to catch it.